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TITLE: Risk Behaviors and HIV prevalence Among Injection Drug Users Being Booked In Jail

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OBJECTIVES: HIV prevalence has remained low (4%) among injection drug users (IDUs) in King County (KC), WA. However, the HIV outbreak among IDUs in nearby Vancouver, BC and the high incidence of hepatitis B and C among KC IDUs has prompted concern that a similar HIV outbreak could occur in King County. The King County Correctional Facility (jail) was chosen as a survey site because it has been shown that 90% of KC IDUs had ever been in jail and nearly 30% had been in jail in the past month. In an effort to provide an early alert to changes in HIV infection rates among IDUs, we assessed HIV prevalence, incidence, and related risk behaviors among IDUs being booked in jail, and evaluated this approach for monitoring HIV among IDUs.

METHODS: Persons being booked in jail who were 18 years or older, English and who had used injection drugs in the past 12 months were referred to the jail health clinic for HIV counseling and testing (C&T) and were offered a monetary incentive to complete a brief supplemental interview about drug use, travel patterns, and related risk behaviors. Those who were released from jail before HIV C&T could be made available were referred to our nearby office for counseling, testing, and participation in the survey. Other IDUs who were not intercepted at booking but sought HIV C&T at the jail health clinic were also eligible for study participation.

RESULTS: From September 1998 through March 1999, 2332 persons were intercepted at the jail, 85% of whom agreed to the initial interview. Two-thirds had ever had an HIV test. Fifteen percent of interviewees met the study eligibility criteria and were referred for HIV C&T; 31% (91) of those have participated so far. An additional 30 IDUs were enrolled directly from the jail of those counseled and tested had injected heroin, 60% had injected cocaine, and two-thirds had injected health clinic. Over the past year, 87% heroin and cocaine together; 58% injected drugs at least once a day over the past 30 days. During the prior 6 months, half had injected drugs with a needle that had been used before them by someone else, two-thirds had used a cooker after someone else had used it, and over half divided up drugs with someone else using the same needle or syringe. Two percent tested positive for HIV.

CONCLUSIONS: Interpretations of the results in view of the low preliminary participation rate will be aided by comparing characteristics of participants and nonparticipants. Participation rates among people who were released quickly from jail may be improved by increasing the monetary incentive. Despite initial challenges, intercepting IDUs being booked in jail is a feasible way of monitoring HIV and related risk behaviors among IDUs, providing HIV C&T to a high risk population not necessarily in treatment, and supplying valuable data for community planning and evaluation of HIV prevention and education services.

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